

Title: Research and Resources on Dropout Prevention and State Policy

Date: August 2013

Question: >> What are some key resources in the area of dropout prevention and state policy?

Response:

Each state, school district, and school is unique, and therefore there are no step-by-step guides as to how to change policies to increase high school graduation and reduce dropouts. However, there are resources that can help states take the first steps to ensure the change and implementation of policies that promote student graduation and prevent disengagement that leads to dropouts.

This memo includes:

- **Reports:** Research and policy-oriented reports about dropout prevention.
 - Citations include a link to a free online version, except in the case of the book included in this section (Rumberger, 2011).
 - Citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the publication.
- **Relevant organizations** focusing on dropout prevention that may provide helpful information.
 - Descriptions of the organizations are copied from the websites directly.
 - Specific relevant resources from these websites/organizations are highlighted in some cases.
 - Two examples of efforts at the level of the state department of education are included here (Colorado and Michigan).

We have not done an evaluation of these resources or organizations but, rather, provide them for your information only.

REPORTS

Almeida, C., Steinberg, A., Santos, J., & Le, C. (2010). *Six pillars of effective dropout prevention and recovery: An assessment of current state policy and how to improve it*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Retrieved on August 2, 2013, from <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/DropoutBrief-090810.pdf>

Summary: This report identifies six model policy elements that frame a sound legislative strategy for dropout prevention and recovery, and it assesses the extent to which recent state policy aligns with these model elements. Overall, 36 states and the District of Columbia have enacted new dropout legislation since 2002. While some states have moved toward adopting comprehensive dropout prevention and recovery policies, nearly all of them have a long way to go. Nearly one-third of the nation—14 states—have enacted no new laws aimed at increasing graduation rates in the past eight years.

Cortiella, C. (2013). *Diplomas at risk: A critical look at the graduation rate of students with learning disabilities*. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved on August 5, 2013, from <http://www.nclد.org/images/content/files/diplomas-at-risk/DiplomasatRisk.pdf>

Excerpt: The report makes key recommendations at the federal and state level to improve the graduation rate of students with specific learning disabilities, and to assure consistency and comparability in the graduation data for the subgroup of students with disabilities. They are:

- Maintaining and improving the current requirement to use the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) is critical to improving graduation rates for students with SLD. ACGR for students with disabilities should be analyzed by disability type for additional information.
- Congress and the U.S. Department of Education should incorporate the use of the ACGR into all monitoring and compliance activities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- States should be required to implement evidence-based early warning systems in all high schools that have significant graduation rate gaps between all students, and students with disabilities.
- States with multiple diploma options and low graduation rates for students with disabilities and/or significant graduation rate gaps for students with disabilities should closely examine the impact of multiple diploma options, graduation requirements, and exit exam policies.
- States should ensure policies that encourage early decisions that put students on an alternate route to exiting high school without a regular diploma are eliminated.

Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). *Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center, Communities In Schools, Inc. Retrieved on August 8, 2013, from http://www.dropoutprevention.org/sites/default/files/uploads/major_reports/DropoutRiskFactorsandExemplaryProgramsFINAL5-16-07.pdf

Excerpt: Communities In Schools (CIS) is the nation's fifth-largest youth-serving organization and the leading dropout prevention organization, delivering resources to nearly one million students in 3,250 schools across the country. To further their network-wide commitment to evidence-based practice, CIS collaborated with the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University (NDPC/N) to conduct a comprehensive study of the dropout crisis in the United States. Specifically, the intent of the study was to: 1) Identify the risk factors or conditions that significantly increase the likelihood of students dropping out of school; and 2) Identify exemplary, evidence-based programs that address the identified risk factors and conditions.

Herlihy, C. M., & Quint, J. (2006). *Emerging evidence on improving high school student achievement and graduation rates: The effects on four popular improvement programs*. Washington, DC: National High School Center, American Institutes for Research. Retrieved on August 2, 2013, from http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/documents/NHSC_EmergingEvidence_010907_000.pdf

Summary: The National High School Center released methods for improving low-performing high schools based on some of the most rigorous research currently available in the school reform arena. This research brief identifies lessons learned as well as key practices used to strengthen high schools and is based on evaluations of four widely used high school improvement programs—Career Academies, First Things First, Project GRAD, and Talent Development.

Jerald, C. (2006). *Identifying potential dropouts: Key lessons for building an Early Warning Data System*. Washington, DC: Achieve. Retrieved on August 2, 2013, from <http://www.achieve.org/files/Identifying-Potential-Dropouts.pdf>

Excerpt: This white paper was prepared for *Staying the Course: High Standards and Improved Graduation Rates*, a joint project of Achieve and Jobs for the Future funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. Its goal is to provide policymakers with an overview of research about the dropout problem and the best strategies for building an early warning data system that can signal which students and schools are most in need of interventions.

National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices. (2011). *State policies to re-engage dropouts*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on August 2, 2013, from <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1107REENGAGEDROPOUTS.PDF>

Excerpt: Dropout recovery can succeed if states take these actions to facilitate the reengagement of out-of-school youth:

- Set a goal to reduce the dropout rate;
- Use data to identify dropouts and target recovery strategies;
- Provide flexible, high-quality school options for recovered dropouts; and
- Consider incentives to focus on dropout recovery if resources exist.

As states face a new economic reality, governors may not be able to implement all of the policy recommendations outlined in this brief. Yet each recommendation can improve dropout recovery in schools and districts. Together, the recommendations create a comprehensive policy framework for reengaging out-of-school youth.

Princiotta, D., & Reyna, R. (2009). *Achieving graduation for all: A governor's guide to dropout prevention and recovery*. Washington, DC: The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Retrieved on August 5, 2013, from <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0910ACHIEVINGGRADUATION.PDF>

Excerpt: Governors are in an extraordinary position to stem the tide of high school dropouts. To do so, governors should take four actions:

- Promote high school graduation for all. Governors can raise the maximum compulsory and allowable school attendance ages, count graduation rates heavily in state accountability systems, champion higher graduation rates, and assign responsibility for dropout prevention and recovery.
- Target youth at risk of dropping out. Governors can support the creation of early warning data systems to identify individual students who are likely to drop out, and they can support local and state efforts to provide students with effective interventions and supports.
- Reengage youth who have dropped out of school. Governors can create incentives for dropout recovery, employ outreach strategies to reengage out-of-school youth, and establish re-entry programs for juvenile offenders.
- Provide rigorous, relevant options for earning a high school diploma. Governors can create new, effective schools and learning programs, turn around low-performing schools, and award credit for performance—not seat time—to galvanize dropout prevention and recovery efforts.

Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy. (2011). *Meeting the challenge: Fiscal implications of dropout prevention in Massachusetts*. Cambridge, MA: Author. Retrieved on August 2, 2013, from http://renniecenter.issuelab.org/resource/meeting_the_challenge_fiscal_implications_of_dropout_prevention_in_massachusetts

Summary: This brief begins with an overview of existing statewide efforts to prevent dropouts; then summarizes the themes common across five districts that have established a systemic approach to reducing their dropout rates; describes the specific strategies viewed as effective by school and district leaders; considers the costs of dropout prevention efforts; and offers considerations, based on findings, for policymakers and school and district leaders. It includes Considerations for State Policymakers:

- Work to establish sustainable funding streams for districts' dropout prevention initiatives.
- Continue to promote, provide, and seek ways to expand data collection and analysis tools for schools and districts.
- Strengthen the ability of districts to establish partnerships with community-based social service agencies, local businesses, and institutions of higher education.
- Facilitate outreach to dropouts.
- Expand alternative education options.

Rumberger, R. (2011). *Dropping out: Why students drop out of high school and what can be done about it*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Book description: The vast majority of kids in the developed world finish high school—but not in the United States. More than a million kids drop out every year, around 7,000 a day, and the numbers are rising. *Dropping Out* offers a comprehensive overview by one of the country's leading experts, and provides answers to fundamental questions: Who drops out, and why? What happens to them when they do? How can we prevent at-risk kids from short-circuiting their futures? Students start disengaging long before they get to high school, and the consequences are severe—not just for individuals but for the larger society and economy. Dropouts never catch up with high school graduates on any measure. They are less likely to find work at all, and more likely to live in poverty, commit crimes, and suffer health problems. Even life expectancy for dropouts is shorter by seven years than for those who earn a diploma. Russell Rumberger advocates targeting the most vulnerable students as far back as the early elementary grades. And he levels sharp criticism at the conventional definition of success as readiness for college. He argues that high schools must offer all students what they need to succeed in the workplace and independent adult life. A more flexible and practical definition of achievement—one in which a high school education does not simply qualify you for more school—can make school make sense to young people. And maybe keep them there.

Youth Transition Funders Group. (2008). *Closing the graduation gap: A Superintendent's guide for planning multiple pathways to graduation*. Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved on August 2, 2013, from <http://www.ytfg.org/documents/ClosingtheGraduationGapFinal13October2008.pdf>

Summary: This guide, built upon the emerging lessons from successful districts nationwide, is designed to help districts plan a comprehensive reform process to increase graduation rates for all students. It includes definitions of key ideas and strategies, tools to help superintendents and district staff begin planning, case studies from districts, and information resources.

RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS

Achieve

<http://www.achieve.org>

Achieve is a bipartisan, non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, work, and citizenship.

To make college and career readiness a priority in the states, in 2005, Achieve launched the **American Diploma Project (ADP) Network** (<http://www.achieve.org/adp-network>). Starting with only a handful of states, the Network has now grown to include 35 states educating 85 percent of all U.S. public school students. Through the ADP Network governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders, and business executives work together to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning high school standards, graduation requirements, and assessment and accountability systems with the demands of college and careers.

America's Promise Alliance—Grad Nation

<http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation.aspx>

Grad Nation is a large and growing movement of dedicated individuals, organizations, and communities working together to end America's dropout crisis. Grad Nation goals include achieving a 90 percent graduation rate nationwide by 2020, with no high school graduating less than 80 percent of its students, and regaining America's standing as first in the world in college completion.

Grad Nation 2012 report

<http://www.americaspromise.org/~media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation/BuildingAGradNation2012.ashx>

Excerpt: State Strategies:

- Understanding the graduation rate in communities and states. There are many estimates of graduation rates, but most do not accurately capture the extent of the dropout crisis. See Part 2 of this report to find out which states and communities are using the adjusted cohort graduation rate method. Additional information on how

- states are doing as measured by the Civic Marshall Plan Indices is available at <http://www.every1graduates.org>
- Investing smartly in education. State budgets are tight, but the economic costs of failing to invest are greater. The waiver process from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provides states flexibility on how to spend some of their federal education dollars. These dollars should be strategically invested in evidence-based programs for school readiness, school improvement, and student support. States and corporations should invest to strengthen the link between high schools, community colleges, and technical institutes, and employers to prepare young people for entry into skilled occupations. To learn more, see the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Economy project available at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/Econ
 - Transparency in the NCLB waivers and waiver process. These waivers, if granted, can affect policies at the school, district, and state levels. Additional information on these waivers is available in the recent brief by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.
 - Creating a College and Career Readiness Accountability Model for High School (available at <http://www.nga.org/cms/center>)
 - Raising the compulsory school age to when students graduate or 18. Existing research shows that raising the compulsory school age acts as a constraint on dropping out and boosts earnings. The Case for Reform provides information from state legislators and governors on how these laws have been recently updated in certain states, available at: http://www.civicerprises.net/reports/the_case_for_reform.pdf
 - Learning from models of success like Tennessee and New York. Reform efforts should benefit from models of success and help promote the use of evidence-based strategies, school turnaround and replacement models, and research-based interventions. The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) is a central source of scientific evidence for what works in education, available at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>
 - Doing a policy audit at the school, district, and state levels. This audit should ensure basic school attendance, behavior, and course passing policies support graduation for all. The Center for Public Education's Guiding Questions informs this process, available at <http://www.data-first.org/learning/guiding-questions/>
 - Using longitudinal data systems to analyze graduation and dropout trends. Efforts should be undertaken to examine a recent year's dropouts and analyze them by age and credits shy of graduation to identify which targeted strategies should be implemented to meet student needs. Such efforts can partner with an educational research institution, such as those listed in <http://drdc.uchicago.edu/links/education-links.html>
 - Putting early warning indicator and intervention systems in place in every district with a low graduation rate high school. EWS should be in place no later than middle school. *On Track for Success: The Use of Early Warning Indicator and Intervention Systems* highlights best practices from across the country, available at http://www.civicerprises.net/reports/on_track_for_success.pdf
 - Measuring and reporting on chronic absenteeism at the school, district, and state levels. Collecting and reporting data on chronic absenteeism should become common practice at the school, district, and state levels. Efforts can be informed by the tools and strategies to promote attendance from Attendance Works, available at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-can-i-do>

- Developing a State Civic Marshall Plan. Creating results-driven partnerships with key actors in the state who are interested in cradle to career education efforts is essential to success. States should work to identify major assets and needs related to the Civic Marshall Plan benchmarks, mobilize key partners in the state to align their efforts with those benchmarks, and report results every year. The Leadership Council of the Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation can support these efforts.

California Dropout Prevention Project

<http://www.cdrp.ucsb.edu/about.htm>

The California Dropout Research Project (CDRP) was established in December 2006 to synthesize existing research and undertake new research to inform policymakers, educators, and the general public about the nature of the dropout crisis in California and to help the state develop a meaningful policy agenda to address the problem.

Education Commission of the States

<http://www.ecs.org>

The mission of the Education Commission of the States is to help states develop effective policy and practice for public education by providing data, research, analysis, and leadership; and by facilitating collaboration, the exchange of ideas among the states, and long-range strategic thinking.

The Progress of Education Reform 2007: Dropout Prevention

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/75/33/7533.pdf>

This issue of The Progress of Education Reform summarizes the findings of five recent studies that address:

- Early (6th-grade) predictors for dropping out of school
- Ninth-grade predictors of risk in an urban environment
- School characteristics linked to higher graduation rates
- Economic benefits of several programs that positively influence high school completion rates
- A synthesis of the research on dropping out and the importance of state data systems to support dropout prevention efforts.

Michigan’s Challenge to Schools

http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-5235_53792---,00.html

During the summer of 2009, Michigan’s State Superintendent of Schools issued a challenge to all Michigan schools to identify 10–15 students in all elementary, middle, and high schools who are nearing or in a transition year with multiple dropout risk factors and provide research-based supports and interventions. As a result, over 1,300 schools, including all schools in 170 districts, have accepted this Challenge.

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) was begun in 1986 to serve as a clearinghouse on issues related to dropout prevention and to offer strategies designed to increase the graduation rate in America's schools. Over the years, the NDPC/N has become a well-established national resource for sharing solutions for student success. It does so through its clearinghouse function, active research and evaluation projects, publications, and through a variety of professional development activities. In addition, the NDPC/N conducts a variety of third-party evaluations and Program Assessment and Reviews (PAR).

National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices: State Strategies to Achieve Graduation for All

<http://www.nga.org/cms/home/nga-center-for-best-practices/center-publications/page-edu-publications/col2-content/main-content-list/state-strategies-to-achieve-grad.html>

As part of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practice's dropout prevention and recovery work, grants were awarded to six states—**Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Tennessee, and West Virginia**—to develop comprehensive state dropout prevention and recovery policies.

The Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement at the Colorado Department of Education

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/DropoutPrevention/bestpractices/IncreasingGraduation.htm>

The Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement at the Colorado Department of Education has specifically selected these **recommendations** to effectively address the combination of reasons students drop out of school:

1. Establishing an early warning system to determine who is at risk of dropping out of school.
2. Establishing transition programs in elementary to middle, middle and high school, high school to postsecondary grades to provide students additional supports preparing them for the upcoming year.
3. Evaluating and changing current policies and practices at the state, district, and school level that may be hindering students from graduating.
4. Building family, school, community engagement in an effort to prevent students from dropping out of school.
5. Employing a rigorous and relevant curriculum to engage students and facilitate links between curriculum and real life.
6. Developing school and teacher leadership (as discussed in rigorous and relevant curriculum section of the guide).
7. Developing systems for data collection, tracking of process and results, evaluation and use of evaluation to make adjustments and corrections as applicable (as discussed in early warning system section of the guide).

The Colorado Department of Education also provides the *Practices Assessment Template*. This is a comprehensive activity that guides school- and district-level administration through a series of questions related to current policies and practices in the school or district. The activity is designed to uncover policies and practices that may be unintentionally pushing kids out. Sample policies and suggestions will be provided upon completion of the school/district *Practices Assessment*. The Practices Assessment is an evaluation of policies, practices, programs, services,

and attitudes, school culture and climate that intentionally or unintentionally support or hinder the success of students in their ability to get through school from school culminating with a high school diploma. Specifically, the practices assessment, at minimum, shall address:

1. Attendance and truancy reporting enforcement policies and definitions;
2. Risk factors and remedies applicable to students who are failing one or more courses, have experienced traumatic life events, or have lost academic interest or motivation and to students whose presence or actions are perceived to be detrimental to other students;
3. Interaction with the juvenile justice system in enforcing compulsory school attendance;
4. Interaction with the juvenile justice system in:
 - a. Assisting in administering juvenile diversion programs and coordinating supports for all students transitioning out of the juvenile justice system to aid in the continuation of the students' education, especially those students involved in the juvenile justice system as a result of school-related violations of the local education providers code of conduct or crimes committed on school property; and
 - b. Coordinating with juvenile probation officers regarding school-related conditions of probation;
5. Coordination with child welfare services, including but not limited to county departments of social services, facility schools, and other youth services providers;
6. Grading policies;
7. Policies for grade repetition and remediation;
8. Course completion requirements and policies; and
9. Policies and practices relating to:
 - a. The use of career and academic plans;
 - b. Addressing ethnicity, language, and cultural barriers between students' home and school;
 - c. English language acquisition;
 - d. Student acquisition of behavioral, social, and emotional skills;
 - e. Students' health care needs;
 - f. Alternative and flexible education options;
 - g. Family involvement and support services;
 - h. Expanded learning opportunity programs;
 - i. Staff development in implementing evidence-based strategies;
 - j. Innovations to address barriers to school engagement and success;
 - k. Outreach services to re-engage students who drop out of school; and
10. Review and analysis of data regarding dropout rates, graduation rates, school completion rates, truancy rates, the number of students who are habitually truant, suspension rates and expulsion rates.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“dropout prevention” and “state policy”; “increasing graduation” and “state policy”; “student re-engagement” and “state policy.”

Search of Databases

ERIC, EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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